

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

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AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY PARIS

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AMCONSUL CASABLANCA

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CINCUSNAVEUR

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SIXTHFLT

C O N F I D E N T I A L NOUAKCHOTT 2214

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PBOR, PINS, MR, SS

SUBJ: SAHARA WATCH: VIEW FROM PMUADHIBOU

SUMMARY: DURING RECENT FOUR-DAY FIELD TRIP TO NOUADHIBOU, WHICH BORDERS ALONG SOUTHERN TAIL OF SPANISH SAHARA, DCM HAD OPPORTUNITY TO DISCUSS SAHARA ISSUE WITH LOCAL OFFICIALS AND GUAGE STATE OF LOCAL AGITATION ON ISSUE. NORMALITY AND TRANQUILITY REIGN IN NOUADHIBOU. OCCASIONAL MEETING OR LOCAL DEMONSTRATION IS ONLY OUTWARD INDICATION OF INTEREST IN SAHARA QUESTION. THERE IS COMPLETE FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT BETWEEN NOUADHIBOU AND TOWN OF LA GUERA IN SPANISH SAHARA. SPANISH NAVAL VESSEL IS, HOWEVER, STANDING OFF LA GUERA. END SUMMARY.

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1. DCM ACCOMPANIED REGIONAL FISHERIES ATTACHE TO NOUADHIBOU OCTOBER 25-28. NOUADHIBOU, MAURITANIA'S PRINCIPAL PORT AND COMMERCIAL CENTER, IS ALSO CAPITAL OF EIGHTH REGION. OL IS LOCATED ON EASTERN SIDE OF NARROW PENINSULA WHICH IS DIVIDED BETWEEN MAURITANIA AND SPANISH SAHARA. TEN KILOMETERS FROM NOUADHIBOU IS SMALL SPANISH SAHARAN TOWN OF LA GUERA, WHICH IS ALMOST TOTALLY DEPENDENT ON NOUADHIBOU FOR SUPPLY SOME PERSONS WHO WORK IN LA GUERA RESIDE IN NOUADHIBOU. TOWN HAS NEITHER PORT NOR WHARF. LA GUERA DEPENDENCY ON NOUADHIBOU IS ILLUSTRATED BY OPERATION OF TWO FISHMEAL FACTORIES IN SPANISH TOWN FOR WHICH FISH ARE OFF-LOADED AT NOUADHIBOU AND TRANSPORTED TO LA GUERA BY TRUCK. FISHMEAL IS THEN SENT BACK TO NOUADHIBOU BY TRUCK FOR EXPORT.

2. DURING FOUR-DAY VISIT, NOUADHIBOU WAS PICTURE OF TRANQUILITY AND SERENITY. OTHER THAN SMALL MEETING OCTOBER 27, FOLLOWED BY BRIEF DEMONSTRATION IN SUPPORT OF "MAURITANIAN SAHARA POLICY", THERE WAS NO UNUSUAL ACTIVITY OR OUTWARD MANIFESTATION OF ANY PARTICULAR INTEREST IN ISSUE. NOR WAS THERE ANY SPECIAL MILITARY PRESENCE. COMMERCIAL AND PORT ACTIVITIES REMAIN TOTALLY UNAFFECTED BY SAHARA PROBLEMS. MOREOVER, THERE WAS COMPLETE FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT BETWEEN NOUADHIBOU AND LA GUERA. ACCORDING TO WELL-INFORMED PERSONS IN NOUADHIBOU, THERE IS ONE SPANISH NAVAL VESSEL ANCHORED OFF LA GUERA. TWO SENIOR MAURITANIAN OFFICIALS COMMENTED INDEPENDENTLY TO DCM THAT PURPOSE OF VESSEL IS "FAIRE L'IMPRESSION". OTHER OBSERVERS IN NOUADHIBOU SUGGESTED, HOWEVER, THAT VESSEL'S MISSION IS TO EVACUATE SPANISH RESIDENTS FROM LA GUERA. IN ANY EVENT, THERE DOES NOT YET APPEAR TO BE ANY MASSIVE MOVEMENT OUT OF LA GUERA.

3. DURING LONG DINNER CONVERSATION ON TOPIC OF SAHARA, GOVERNOR OF EIGHTH REGION COMMENTED TO DCM THAT MAURITANIA IS CONTINUING ITS COMMON POLICY WITH MOROCCO. (IT IS, NEVERTHELESS, INTERESTING THAT OFFICIAL MAURITANIAN PRESS HAS MADE NO MENTION OF JOINT POLICY SINCE MOROCCO ANNOUNCED ITS MARCH.) WHEN ASKED WHAT CARDS MAURITANIA HAS TO PLAY IN PURSUING THIS JOINT

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POLICY, GOVERNOR REPLIED, "WE HAVE FAITH IN FUTURE". GOVERNOR WAS RELUCTANT TO EXPRESS OPINION ON MOROCCAN MARCH, BUT MADE IT VERY CLEAR THAT PARALLEL MAURITANIAN MARCH INTO SAHARA MAKES NO SENSE AND THAT SUCH AN UNDERTAKING WILL NOT BE AUTHORIZED IN HIS REGION. HE SAID LOGISTICAL REASONS WEIGHED HEAVILY IN HIS DECISION. FACT REMAINS THAT IT WOULD BE SIMPLE MATTER TO MARCH LARGE SEGMENT OF NOUADHIBOU POPULATION ALONG 10 KILO-

METERS OF GOOD ROAD TO LA GUEARA. WHEN ASKED ABOUT TROUBLEMAKING POTENTIAL OF F POLISARIO, GOVERNOR NOTED THAT ORGANIZATION COULD NOT EXIST WITHOUT ASSISTANCE OF ALGERIA. (RESIDENT EXPATRIATE REPORTED, HOWEVER, THAT DURING VISIT TO CITY BY REPRESENTATIVES OF U.N. COMMITTEE OF 24 IN JUNE THERE WERE AT LEAST AS MANY SUPPORTERS OF INDEPENDENT SAHARA AS THERE WERE FOR MAURITANIAN-MOROCCAN POLICY. PERSONS SUPPORTING INDEPENDENCE APPARENTLY CROSSED INTO MAURITANIA ESPECIALLY FOR THIS OCCASION.) GOVERNOR CONCLUDED DISCUSSION OF SAHARA BY REFERRING TO MOROCCAN MARCH, NOTING THAT MAURITANIAN POLICY ON SAHARA ISSUE IS MORE MODERATE.

4. COMMENT: RELATIVE LACK OF GIRM ACTIVITY IN NOUADHIBOU ON SAHARA QUESTION IS IN SHARP CONTRAST TO REPORTS OF DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTHERN MOROCCO. AT SAME TIME, MAURITANIAN INTEREST IN ISSUE, AT LEAST AMONG CERTAIN ELEMENTS OF POPULATION, REMAINS HIGH. ONE MAURITANIAN OFFICIAL ENCOUNTERED IN NOUADHIBOU, WHO WAS BORN IN SAHARA AND HAS RELATIVELY LIVING THERE, INSISTED THAT SAHARA WOULD BE PART OF MAURITANIA IN MATTER OF DAYS. OTHER MAURITANIANS, HOWEVER, PARTICULARLY AFRICANS FROM SENEGAL RIVER AREA, FIND IT VERY DIFFICULT TO GET LEAST BIT AGITATED OVER ISSUE. BASED ON FIRST-HAND OBSERVATION AND COMMENTS OF GOVERNOR, IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT GIRM, AT LEAST IN EIGHTH REGION, HAS NO INTENTION OF SANCTIONING MARCH INTO SAHARA. WE ALSO BELIEVE IT HIGHLY UNLIKELY THERE WILL BE ORGANIZED MARCHES EMANATING FROM OTHER PORTIONS OF MAURITANIA AS HAS BEEN SUGGESTED IN REPORTS CONTAINED STATE 254092 AND MADRID 7475. THERE IS, HOWEVER, CONSTANT NOMADIC MOVEMENT BETWEEN SAHARA AND MAURITANIA ACROSS FORMAL FRONTIER. IT

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IS NOT INCONCEIVABLE THEREFORE THAT HANDFUL OF MIGRATING TRIBESMEN MIGHT COORDINATE THEIR MOVEMENTS AND, WITH LEAD CAMELS PROUDLY BEARING "GREATER MAURITANIA NOW" BANNERS, MOVE 30 OR 40 FAMILY GROUPS INTO SPANISH OCCUPIED SAHARA IN WHOLLY SERIOUS (AND TOTALLY UNOFFICIAL) POLITICAL DEMONSTRATION PARALLELING WIDELY-PUBLICIZED GREEN MARCH OF THEIR NORTHERN BROTHERS. HANDYSIDE

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